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SUBJECT: PUTIN-SAAKASHVILI TALKS: PRELIMINARY READOUTS

Classified By: Minister-Counselor for Political Affairs Kirk Augustine.
Reason 1.4 (b, d)

¶1. (C) Georgian DCM Shugarov and Russian MFA Caucasus conflicts division chief Dvinyanin gave us preliminary readouts of the June 13 discussion between Russian President Putin and Georgian President Saakashvili in St. Petersburg. They had received brief telephone readouts from their respective superiors, both of whom had been in the meeting and had not yet returned to Moscow.

¶2. (C) The meeting lasted over two hours, from nearly 11 PM June 13 to 1 AM June 14, and was followed by a brief press conference. Dvinyanin explained that the length of the meeting did not necessarily reflect its content: Putin had said he "likes to chat" with Misha. Both sides agreed the atmosphere was positive. Shugarov said the Georgian reaction was "cautious optimism." Dvinyanin said there were no "sharp points." They also agreed, however, that no concrete issues were resolved. The Russians had not acceded to Georgia's desire for a statement in which Russia would recognize South Ossetia as part of Georgia.

¶3. (C) Dvinyanin said most of the talks concerned trade (though not specifically the ban on wine imports). Saakashvili assured Putin that Russia would remain Georgia's largest trading partner. Other topics, according to Dvinyanin:

-- They agreed to set up a hot-line to prevent misunderstandings (modalities to be determined).

-- Putin raised Russia's February proposal to set up an anti-terrorism center on the site of the former Russian base in Batumi. Georgia had not replied. Saakashvili undertook to look into it.

-- Frozen conflicts were discussed in only general terms.

-- Saakashvili confirmed to Putin Georgia's desire to enter NATO.

¶4. (U) The press conference proceeded without too many barbs, though Putin cited Chechnya as a good example of the resolution of separatist conflicts, and Saakashvili admitted that Russia and Georgia were "doomed to good-neighborliness."

There was even an attempt at light-heartedness. Asked whether Georgia and Russia had grown any closer, Putin replied, "Not long ago I was in Sochi. There you can walk right up to the border. How could you get any closer?" Saakashvili added, "But there, the other side of the border is Abkhazia. So if anyone had any doubts that that is Georgia, Vladimir Vladimirovich has now dispelled them."

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